Exploration of Practices in Partnering

by

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ABSTRACT

Exploration of Practice in Partnering is a curriculum-based, research thesis, focused on the investigation of the potential impact of studying multiple forms of dance partnering through a constructivist learning lens. The primary goal was to discover concepts and practices that underlie effective dance partnering. The study was conducted in a 15-week university dance course that provided a survey of partnering dance forms taught by the researcher who is versed in the chosen forms. In addition to professional knowledge and experience, the researcher includes theory and pedagogy from his graduate coursework. Teaching frameworks and learning experiences for the study were informed by somatics and constructivist pedagogy; a student-centered approach to learning in which students might find knowledge and meaning through experience.

The research documented in this thesis may be methodologically described as a case study and the data collection methods were qualitative. Due to IRB limitations, the data set draws only from biweekly journal entries from a class of eleven students, in addition to the researcher's observation of students. Data streams from student journal entries were analyzed and interpreted using common protocols. Guiding questions for the research study included: How do students currently understand and perceive partnering? How do leader and follower roles play a part in dance partnering? What commonalities of partnering exist between different dance forms? Data gathered from the research revealed that each individual student's understanding and definition of dance partnering changed over the course of the semester and students found increased meaning in their partnering interactions.

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INTRODUCTION

The physical act of partnering in dance is one of the most recognizable but least researched interactions involving two people moving through space and time. Interaction in dance may be verbal or non-verbal, such as bodily touch or a perceived gesture. Some examples of extraordinary partnering include works created by modern dance artists like Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, and ballet dancers Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev. Performers have also used inanimate objects with which to partner, such as Fred Astaire dancing with a coat rack in the 1951 film *Royal Wedding* and choreographer Zvi Gotheiner's more contemporary 1991 work, *Chairs*, featuring various relationships between eleven dancers and chairs. From the beginning of my late yet intense immersion in dance, partnering has over time become the form that I am most passionate and continuously curious about. I understand it as a human relationship that enables individuals to communicate on physical, emotional, intellectual, and even spiritual levels.

In my professional experience, I have come across few dance instructors that are able to teach partnering in multiple forms. My own training in classical ballet, contact improvisation, modern, and postmodern dance qualifies me to speak to the unique features of partnering across these styles. When first introduced to partnering, I found that I had a natural care for my partner; a care that made him/her feel comfortable and more at ease while working with me. I started my dance training when I was sixteen years of age and was exposed to partnering through classical ballet. I learned very quickly that a lot of the work in classical partnering required great sensitivity to be able to anticipate another's

reaction to enhance the freedom as well as safety in how we moved together. It also was important to recognize that each body was unique and had different proportions and characteristics, so what was successful in one partnering situation may not be successful in another. During my younger years, I found that the most difficult skills to develop in partnering were timing and the ability to listen through touch; something I would only discover later in my life and eventually relate to the practices of somatics. While training during my undergraduate degree I began to realize that limiting myself to classical ballet partnering was not going to provide me enough experience and development to become a career dancer. This realization became apparent during the rehearsal process of a new work by Scott Jovovich, for which I was selected as a guest artist performer. It was in this rehearsal process that I was given the opportunity to work in more than one style of partnering. I quickly recognized that dancers should learn all styles to be versatile and adapt to any choreographic context, which motivated me to seek further training in forms such as contact improvisation, modern, salsa, and then later on in capoeira. After many years studying these forms in which partnering is requisite, I have found a way to connect all forms of dance using partnering and somatic sensitivity as the medium and base. This thesis is based on that discovery.

My experiences in dance and partnering drive my work as a performing artist, choreographer, and educator. Today I am completely immersed in this inquiry, particularly focused on how to best design and implement a course that explores the diverse aspects of partnering. It has been my goal to create a learning framework that enables students to gain transferable skills that accommodate all types of dancing. In the research and development

of the curriculum for this course work, I reference my professional training in partnering with various artists to better facilitate a fulfilling exploration. I feel that partnering in multiple forms of dance and somatic knowledge should be a part of every dance student's training in higher education to further prepare them for a possible professional career.

Acquiring experience of substantial breadth and depth in partnering in higher education typically means that students must take multiple courses to experience different approaches. In current times this becomes problematic for the student who is focused on finishing their degree with limitations in time, finances and freedom in scheduling additional electives that could provide more in-depth experience. To complicate this problem, few instructors have diverse and masterful training in multiple dance forms, especially when it comes to partnering. As a result, students are not exposed to many potentially meaningful connections embedded in the practice of partnering that transcend style. This deficit may prove to be a critical handicap for students transitioning into the professional performance environment, where they are asked to proficiently partner in various differing forms. Deficiencies in mastery of a dance form or negotiating a partnership within that context may hurt the dancer's chances at employment. As such, a partnering course that provides in depth experience may give the student a chance to make these connections. The purpose of this research is to study the pedagogical potential of convening multiple partnering practices together into one course.

The curriculum was developed to allow for the experience of different partnering possibilities and the development of critical skills in synthesizing contrast and comparison between multiple dance styles. Somatic concepts and constructivist teaching perspectives

were utilized to help further partnering capacities, as well as nurture somatic sensitivity between partners. The research study provides a broad look at the concept and practices informing partnering within a university curriculum. In addition, it offers perspectives on student and instructor learning partnering techniques.

The following three questions guide my research inquiry:

1. How do the students currently understand and perceive partnering and how might this view change through constructivist and somatic approaches?
2. How do leader and follower roles play a part in dance partnering?
3. What commonalities of partnering exist between different dance forms?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I provide an overview of strategies used to promote the teaching of partnering in dance and begin by outlining basic attributes necessary for successful dance partnering. Next, I describe constructivist pedagogy, a student-centered approach that may enhance learning the techniques of partnering. The final discussion focuses on employing somatic approaches to teach partnering from an embodied perspective applicable to all dance styles.

Partnering may be understood as a deeply engrained social behavior built on attributes of empathy, communication, and trust. Empathy or the capacity for one to understand another's experience is basic to human evolutionary history; it is hardwired into human biology (Belzung, 2014). With empathy, individuals must interact with each other to form a connection, a core principle of partnering. This kind of interaction could be as simple as making eye contact from across the room and may exist for only a brief moment in time. Conversation can make the moment more intimate, developing the partnership further. Indeed, the rich, multifaceted experience of conversing with others may yield revealing nuances of one's identity. Touch in any form such as a handshake, leaning against one another, or an affectionate embrace can quite possibly grow the connections between people even deeper. In my view, these three interrelated phenomena (eye contact, conversation and touch) underlie rich partnering experiences and are essential factors in developing a deep partnering relationship in which trust, empathy and communication are evident. Likewise, these aspects are also vital components of somatic education.

Successful interactions point to vocal and nonverbal forms of communication, which are equally important in developing effective and meaningful partnerships. Communication may be understood as the process of exchanging facts, ideas, and opinions and a way that individuals or organizations share meaning and understanding with one another (Rayudu, 2010). These interactions can intensify through partnering in dance, which draws on both tactile and non-tactile communication. Indeed, tactile interactions of any kind are often interpreted much faster than speech. The sensing body perceives physical stimuli more quickly than it is able to process auditory stimuli. Through physical contact a different kind of knowledge is developed and expressed. In my own experience in both leading and following roles, I have found that I am able to predict how a person might move before any verbal exchange occurs through somatic awareness.

Through kinesthetic empathy, movers can tap into a deeper sensory level when working closely together – another important and necessary quality of partnerships. Within this kind of non-verbal communication and understanding, one can find a 'frequency of understanding," a term I use to refer to each person's particular energy vibration that can be sensed within oneself or by another. All things vibrate at unique amplitudes and frequencies. To tap into that information, one must heighten their sensitivity to these non-verbal modes of communication through somatic awareness.

Another critical attribute for partnering is trust. The word trust has several meanings and it is closely related to such near-synonyms as confidence, reliance, belief, credence, faith, or conviction (Peperzak, 2013). Without trust, effective dance partnering could not exist. Trust reflects an empathetic commitment to the relationship. Both partners agree to

invest in the process, which is fundamental for developing creative and poignant works of dance. In partnering, the aforementioned characteristics of trust, empathy, and communication, must be symbiotic like the partnership itself, to allow for a successful partnering relationship between dancers. It is evident through the flow and synchronicity of a partnership, whether it is in rehearsal or performance, when these three characteristics exist between two dancers. This process does not come easily. It takes many years of self-discovery and understanding to then be able to explore these characteristics honestly and confidently with a dancer partner.

Dance in contemporary higher education involves different pedagogical models. At Arizona State University in the dance area, most course curricula is student-centered and highlights the study of a singular topic from multiple perspectives. This approach, which is grounded in constructivist pedagogy, situates learners as active agents "involved with content through manipulation of materials and social interaction" (Fred & Janssen, 2013). Constructivist educational approaches build on social developmental theories to create conditions for individuals to freely interact within their social environment and to encourage new relationships to grow, which aligns with practices of discovery learning. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of cultural and contextual features to aid students in better understanding what occurs in society, so that further knowledge construction is built upon this understanding. The learning approach is closely associated with many social developmental theories, most notably those developed by psychologists Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, and Albert Bandura whose work examined the relationship between cognition and interaction (F & Janssen, 2013). Constructivist frameworks involve

the implementation of guided discovery learning (GDL) practices, in which teaching starts by posing a challenging problem that students solve by discovering new knowledge (F & Janssen, 2013).

In developing my pedagogy, I drew from the student-centered education I experienced throughout my first year as a graduate student at ASU. I found constructivist approaches allow students to develop their own learning pathways. The qualities of this type of approach that most apply to a partnering class include democratic cooperation, equity, student-to-student learning, openness to new ideas, and respect for all opinions given. Additionally, the curriculum in the Dance area at ASU is focused on several core values that build on a constructivist epistemology; for example, it emphasizes individual creativity, critical thinking, and synthesis. This emphasis is present across the majority of ASU graduate dance courses. Such emphasis encourages each student to discover and construct knowledge rather than accept the imposition of specific ideals of others. In order to communicate and clearly understand a partner's intentions, students must have the ability to process information, respond authentically, and construct knowledge that is personally relevant and meaningful—which are likewise tenets of constructivist-learning approaches.

Constructivist values align with the work of Howard Gardner, whose original theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) outlines different kinds of strengths or intuitions a person may have or cultivate. Because of its cerebral connotations, the term intelligence is misleading; Gardner notes this, and relates that his use of the term intelligence was at first a "minor lexical substitution." He has since clarified this stating, "an 'intelligence' is a

biopsychological potential that is ours by virtue of our species membership" (Helding, 2009). Gardner's foundational seven intelligences as originally written are: (1) linguistic; (2) logical-mathematical; (3) spatial; (4) bodily-kinesthetic; (5) interpersonal; (6) intrapersonal; and (7) musical (ibid). Linguistic intelligence is a sensitivity to the spoken and written word, to learn languages, and to exploit them to accomplish specific goals. People with strong spatial intelligence perceive the visual world and recreate or alter it in the mind or on paper. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is the ability to use one's body in a skilled way, for self-expression or toward a goal. Interpersonal intelligence requires the ability to perceive and understand other individuals' moods, desires, and motivations. Intrapersonal Intelligence in an understanding of one's own emotions. Finally, those who have strong musical intelligence are more naturally inclined to musicality (Helding, 2009). As an example, a student with more of a Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence might be more adept to become a dancer or possibly a soccer player. Isolating the Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence as distinct from another suggests that a person's brain may work better and learning may deepen if they are exposed to more movement challenges.

In my personal teaching philosophy, the MI framework guides my instructional design to better accommodate students so they may use their individual balance of intelligences to learn and discover new possibilities. In relation to the teaching of partnering in a classroom setting, a mutual attention to these different intelligence modalities in partnerships can foster better verbal and physical communication. Individual students come to class with different strengths and intuitions. My curriculum aims to

engage students in leveraging these intuitions in assisted somatic oriented self-explorations while accessing the kinds of communicative relationships mentioned above.

As individual as a student's intellect is, so is their embodiment. This belief was central to my curriculum for the partnering class I taught. For this MFA research project, I felt it was imperative to employ multiple somatic approaches while teaching partnering to bring the students to a common ground while exploring diverse dance forms, many of which were unfamiliar. Soma, a term coined by Thomas Hannah, refers to the living body, and somatics refers to the study of the soma/body (Rouhiainen, 2008). One of the somatic approaches that has informed my approach to embodiment in my partnering class is Alexander Technique (AT), developed by Frederick Matthias Alexander in the early 20th century. By learning to use the skills of conscious inhibition, directed thought, and reliable sensory perception, an individual is able to elicit his innate capacity for psychomotor coordination (Nettl-Fiol, 2006). This understanding led me to encourage students to discover more freedom within their mind, by letting go of the desire to perfect movements as viewed by an outsider in order to engage more deeply with their partner. This practice, along with the approach to find release of tension within the body were the two main focuses I utilized from the Alexander Technique.

Another useful technique I employed was Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), a method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting and documenting all varieties of human movement. The study of Laban Movement Analysis originated from the work of Rudolf Laban and was further developed and extended by Lisa Ullmann, Irmgard Bartenieff, and Warren Lamb (Dyer, 2001). LMA allowed me to understand, recognize and

talk about movement characteristics and embodied capacities that could support dance partnering techniques. Ideokinesis is another applied somatic practice I incorporated, which encompasses mental visualization of bodily movement in order to improve established neuromuscular habits, effectively cultivating a more accurate experiential understanding of the body and protecting individuals from potential injury (Sweigard, 2013; Dowd, 1995). Finally, Body-Mind Centering (BMC) is an innovative approach to health, movement, and bodywork for infants, children, and adults developed with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen in collaboration with her many students and teachers (Eddy, 2006). BMC is based on the fluidity between mind and body and encourages practitioners to explore that relationship in a way that is meaningful.

Somatic awareness, as developed through the techniques described above, improves a dancer's ability to initiate movements more efficiently and eliminates layers of unnecessary muscular tension in movement performance (Matt, 2012). My personal experience with these somatic tools and practices encouraged a shift in my own teaching philosophy, which was formerly grounded in my very rigid professional ballet training and performance. For this project, I tailored my dance instruction to include these somatic influences and foundations to better facilitate my students in developing an understanding their body-mind by working from the inside out. These somatic concepts were approached through a constructivist lens. It was my intent to assist each student in discovering more about themselves through these practices so that they might better engage with their partner.

Students' experiences with partnering may have positive impacts on their lives outside of the classroom as well. It was my hope that students would discover parallels between partnering in dance and their daily lives, bringing the concepts of empathy, communication, and trust explored in class to their interactions with their peers and community members. Exploring partnering in dance could even be therapeutic for students. A study from the field of dance movement therapy (where dance and movement are used to help individuals navigate through emotional and or personal trauma) found participants of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) experienced positive affective changes. Study participants reported increased confidence; feeling relaxed, more likeable and accepted; as well as increased feelings of affection. The study also found participants reported significantly less anxiety and inhibition. In another experimental study, a single dance intervention was found to decrease depression and increase positive affect and vitality in psychiatric patients with depression" (Koch, Morlinghaus, & Fuchs, 2007).

As humans and social creatures we have an innate sense and desire to feel connections with others. By joining together the positive effects of dance on the human psyche with a movement partnership, individuals may sense increased wellbeing. In my own experience with depression and suicide, I can speak to the benefits of dance and dance partnering as a means of therapy and positive change. While this may not be the focus of this research, it is an important benefit that should be noted. Although my partnering teaching practices would not be the appropriate place to treat someone with such a condition, it could prove to provide additional support for someone experiencing challenges like this.

In dance and movement training, somatic techniques and practices emphasize the individual proprioceptive experience, the individual's own sensing of his or her body. Dancers and performers are often encouraged to use visualization and imagery within training and creation to help with the embodiment of the work. While many of these practices were designed for use by the individual, they have much to offer in the development of strong dance partnerships. Incorporation of these strategies along with a constructivist framework provide a multi-faceted lens for the design and instruction of curriculum in dance partnering. It was this multi-faceted theoretical perspective that created the foundations of my curriculum, which I believed had the greatest potential to guide students towards successful and meaningful partnering practices.

METHODOLOGY

In the fall of 2014, I taught a 15-week course titled Partnering I - to non-dance and dance majors alike at Arizona State University in the School of Film, Dance and Theatre. This class formed the basis of the case study at the center of this thesis. It was taught on Monday and Wednesday from 3:00pm to 4:15pm. Each class followed a progression of lessons that provided content building from one concept and/or skill to the next. The course consisted of five instructional units of approximately two to three weeks in length. These included units on the following: introduction to partnering, classical ballet partnering, contact improvisation, capoeira, and mambo.

At the end of each class period, students responded through writing in journals to questions I posed. The questions asked, related to classroom experiences and were written about or discussed in each respective classroom session. Journal entries provided rich data for analysis and were approved to use for my research by the Institutional Review Board. All students signed a waiver form at the start of the semester releasing their journals for inclusion in the data collection for this research. I collected the journals at the end of the semester and coded their entries alphabetically by first name (e.g. Cynthia: Student 1, Daniella: Student 2, etc.). With the permission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I also recorded students' observations shared in group discussions.

These two data sets formed the material I reflected upon in relationship to the guiding research questions listed earlier in this document. Data analysis followed qualitative research guidelines and protocols. In the analysis portion of this paper, the data entries are tied directly to daily class exercises. Consent to participation and utilization of the data was

voluntary (in accordance to IRB requirements). Quoted from my IRB approved Consent form: "You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Your responses will be anonymous (OR confidential)." Students had the choice to answer or not answer any question they chose to and to contribute their journals to my research if the desired. For this reason, I was only able to use six out the eleven students' journal entries from my course.

The following demographic information about my data set was given to me from the students in their journals and validated using administrative data. There were a total of eleven students enrolled in my partnering class, a mix of six female and five male students. Of the eleven students, three had no dance background and eight students had varying levels of experience across various forms of dance. The student body included second to fourth year undergraduate students. The chosen majors of the students varied widely as well, including but not limited to bioengineering, music, geography, business, and dance.

Here I offer some brief insights into my syllabus in order to contextualize the data put forth in the Analysis section. The three questions that I devised to guide me through my own research are the same questions that the class were to address through the duration of the course. These questions were:

1. How do students currently understand and perceive partnering and how has this view changed?

2. How do leader and follower roles play a part in dance partnering?

3. What commonalities of partnering exist between different dance forms?

Unit I Introduction into Partnering, the first instructional unit, journal entry questions sought to discover how students understood and defined dance partnering. It was important to me to allow each student to express their own voice and ideas about dance partnering. I asked the students to form groups and create brief movement phrases based on their understandings of dance partnering. These phrases would be shown to the group in our next class. Phrases incorporated students' ideas about what partnering in dance meant to them. In the second class of Unit 1, I asked students to begin thinking about the following: *How do I currently understand and perceive partnering? How do leader and follower roles play a part in dance partnering?* In another lesson of the unit I asked students to form working groups. Group 1 was comprised of one female and two males who were studying dance, music, and geography. They created a group dance work in just a few minutes which exhibited partnership between a human, the guitar, and the floor. This exercise aimed to help the students find a new way of allowing someone or something else to inspire them in following.

In a subsequent lesson, I introduced the idea of non-tactile and tactile aspects of partnering. I asked the students to work in partnerships of various numbers and to focus on non-tactile communication. I instructed students to explore their proprioception by working with feeling the heat emitted through their hands or how they sensed heat from others with their eyes closed. Students then worked at a distance from each other and alternated in leader/follower roles. In another exercise students isolated a body part that would lead them through the space on the floor while giving their same attention to their partner moving on the floor. These exercises were very effective in accomplishing my goal

of helping students find care in their moving. This care could be something as simple as not hurting oneself by slamming a body part into the floor. The same care was exercised with their partners. Practicing self-care and awareness, as well as care for a partner could be viewed as a somatic foundation of partnering.

Unit II, or the second instructional unit, focused on classical ballet partnering. Students were encouraged to pull from the tactile, non-tactile exploration from earlier and explore leader and follower roles within classical partnering. I sought to help students bring the same awareness of their body and personal energy to this classical exploration in the hopes of giving students greater understanding of their energy "frequency." This foundational understanding was intended to help students better communicate with their partner through tactile contact. In other words, greater awareness of energy and frequency of self and one's partner helped dancers to communicate better through touch.

Another experience I facilitated involved playing with balance through partnering. Students explored simple balances in fifth position *relevé*. The leader would then take their partner off their center of balance. This exercise immediately targeted trust, communication, and commitment in this one activity. The exercise was then reversed to include the leader becoming the follower, an approach that invited students to observe different situations and conditions for partnering. For this exploration, I drew from Alexander Technique concepts to free the student's bodies and minds in order to increase awareness of what was happening in the exercises. In later classes, we focused on the same principles but began to integrate new exercises with greater difficulty. As the exercises grew the desired partnering characteristics of trust, empathy, and communication become

harder for students to keep in mind. I kept reminding students through different ways to keep working to understand and communicate better with their partner in order to further trust and find empathy for each other.

Sensing fatigue in one class, I decided to devote a class to "bodywork" in order to avoid injuries and promote a sense of well-being and self-care. The bodywork involved students engaging in massage and light stretching that I guided. I noticed a shift in the room from this exercise. Bodywork and somatic practices can lead to closer connections to fellow classmates. This became very apparent. The experience helped students gain somatic and kinesiological understanding of their own bodies that was transferrable to their partnering work. The exercise was aimed at helping students understand the many approaches available to create connections through touch that fostered communication, empathy and trust. After this work, I exposed the students to the history of ballet and partnering through videos shown during class. In a lesson I called "Theater Day," students were guided through a dance production experience, wherein they spent one class in a university theater during technical preparations for a dance show. The goal of this exercise was to help students gain a better sense of what is involved in a performance and to perceive how the concept of partnering might extend to a performance partnership with a crew of stage technicians. The last class for Unit 2 took place off-campus in a social setting of a coffee shop. The goal was to help form closer communication and trust bonds through partnering in a social setting rather than a classroom.

Unit III of instruction focused on partnering in contact improvisation. The goals included focusing on leader and follower roles and connections to a partner while exploring

improvisation. First, I asked my students to engage in an exercise by the Memorial Union walk way, a gathering and social area on the ASU campus. The exercise explored re-patterning within a short time period. Students were to find someone walking through the space and try to copy their characteristics of their body patterning or walking pattern. The body patterning exercise helped students investigate the minute movements of a stranger from a non-tactile perspective while improvising in the space. The improvisation exercise was aimed at helping students realize the small shifts that happen in a person's body while moving, and how small shifts can be informed by others.

The next contact improvisation focused on tactile and non-tactile connections with an exploration into leader and follower roles. The goal of this was to reinforce and further student understandings on the connection between partners. I asked students to simply place themselves back to back with a partner and then, without speaking, decide who was going to lead and who was going to follow while walking around the room. The students could walk backwards, forward, and side to side while maintaining contact with their partner. I asked the students to change partners at random. I sporadically jumped into the exercise to change the dynamics, forcing one person to either steal a partner from someone else or stand back and just observe. This exercise brought into question who is leading and who is following; a question I posed to the students. The third exploration I named "No eyes." The experience focused on furthering the tactile questioning and energy work from our early classes in the introductory unit. Opening the room up, I instructed the students to explore the room with their eyes closed. I helped draw their attention to tactile connections they made with objects and with each other with eyes closed.

After this exercise concluded I led the students through more structured techniques of lifts and weight sharing in contact improvisation. The final exploration through contact improvisation was a "jam" where all dancers were engaged and participating in the exercise freely. Some limitation were placed on the exercise for safety purposes, but for the most part students were free to explore on their own. The goal was for students to use the vocabulary gathered thus far in the semester and to integrate it in this exploration. Different styles of music were played throughout the semester, which became another kind of partner or support to students.

Unit IV of instruction was an introduction to capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art. In this unit, we watched instructional videos about capoeira, which offered rich socio-cultural, political, and economic context. I also brought in some of the musical instruments used in capoeira, which students had an opportunity to play. This provided an opportunity for students to partner with a musical instrument and not just movement. The goal for this first class was to illustrate where capoeira movement comes from. A secondary goal was for students to start to see connections from contact improvisation practices to the improvisation of capoeira within the *roda* or circle. The connection to one's partner was the driving exploration throughout all this.

The next class was an exploration of the "fundamental movement mechanics" of capoeira, much like classical ballet partnering has fundamental movements such as the plie. A goal of this class was to help the students see some of the similarities between capoeira and other dance partnering forms, and to understand characteristics of partnering in capoeira. The next lesson was similar to "Theater Day" from the classical ballet unit. I

asked the students to come view a performance of AXE` Capoeira on the campus of ASU. The goal for this was to show the students the commonalities of Capoeira to other forms of dance and to see the partnering connections created through dance in another form.

Unit V of the instructional units for the course was mambo. For this unit I asked a local expert to help me teach the class, who also happened to be taking my partnering class. An under laying goal for this was that having a fellow student experience all of the explorations throughout the semester that they then would possibly take and allow to influence their exploration into their teaching of this form to the students. The first class of the unit was an introduction to the history of mambo, followed by students learning the basic steps and timing of mambo. Afterward the students worked with one-on-one partnering and incorporated the improvisational qualities of mambo in a social setting. Students explored both leader and follower roles, which they changed multiple times. This was beneficial in helping students explore leader and follower roles to find commonalities across dance forms.

The last lesson of the mambo class involved guiding partners around the room and executing basic turns. Throughout this exercise, students were encouraged to randomly change from a follower to a leader role. It was critical that students were very clear of how and what they were communicating through the tactile contact to their partner. This exercise allowed the students to integrate knowledge and practices from all the other lessons over the semester to help them navigate the room with each other. Some of the major concepts they explored in this lesson experience was communicating through touch from the classical ballet unit, improvising movement with a partner from the contact

improvisation unit, and ‘reading’ one’s partner from the capoeira unit. I prompted and encouraged students to try explore some of these ideas, but left room for them to discover many of these connections on their own. There was no final exam for the students; the concluding assessment involved a verbal discussion with all the students sharing their new ideas and experiences from the semester.

ANALYSIS

My analysis of the journal entries provided by the students is guided by the three questions of my thesis research. Six out of the eleven students presented me with their journals to analysis and use as data. With this data I have created a patterning system to keep track of each entry. This patterning was also influenced but the names of the students (for exsample some of the students had the same letter for their first name). Throughout the course of the semester the students' definitions and understanding of dance partnering began to change in various ways but most intriguing was the shift in the perception of the roles of leader and follower.

1. How do the students currently understand and perceive partnering and how has this view changed?

This was the first question I posed to the students on day one of the course. I was interested in how the students would perceive and define in their own words what partnering was to them. In our final class, we discussed the semester. The feedback given to me was that the students had never thought to place more than one form of partnering into a course. Previous to this experience they believed ballet partnering should be taught within ballet, and modern partnering should be explored with a modern dance class. To have one class that covers multiple forms of dance partnering was something they valued. For them the opportunity to experience more than one form of partnering in just fifteen weeks was exciting and motivating because they were able to integrate information about partnering from multiple movement practices. Students started at the beginning of the

semester with the mindset that partnering was something similar to mambo or classical ballet. Through my observation of the students over the course of the semester, I noted at a very early point how students began to question what partnering was and could be. In their minds it was no longer limited to the more obvious forms like ballet and ballroom styles.

Questioning was the first step of exploration, I asked the students what their definition and understanding of what partnering was. Each student had their own voice and ideas about dance partnering. I asked the students to form groups and create brief movement phrases based on these understandings. They were directed to create phrases that reflected their ideas and understandings of partnering, that would then be shown in our next class. After witnessing the first partnering study, all three of the students in this group stated that while moving, Student 2, who simultaneously played the guitar was a as much of a participant in the partnership as the other two dancing students. Student 2 also stated that the guitar was his partner and that he and his partner [his guitar] were creating a non-tactile connection with Students 1 and 3 while they were dancing.

2. How do leader and follower roles play a part in dance partnering?

These students each shared that they all are very strong willed and always try to lead. This exercise helped them to find a new way of allowing someone or something else to lead. In Student 1's journal entry stated that he while dancing with student J he was being led by what was happening as the music was being created. He also wrote that he felt he could not dance without music. Student 1's journal entry for this class read, "One can dance

ballet or mambo all day by yourself, but it brings a different element when someone takes charge and someone else lets go." One of the understandings students gained from this experience was how leading and following involved taking charge and letting go. Student 5 felt that during this exercise "she was able to lead and follow much easier because she was able to use the heat and the connection." During the feedback session the students shared with me that they felt a deeper connection to their partner because of this experience. Students also recognized they could form a connection in their dancing to something other than another person as a partner.

The "Energy Sensing" exploration of leading and following (described earlier) led students to state they could feel the heat/energy being transmitted from each other's hands that then led to sensing energy from a partner's whole body. The students also stated that they had not thought about partnering from the perspective of energy sensing before. They were intrigued that someone could lead them around a room without touching them while their eyes were closed. Student 5 noticed that he or she "didn't want to move because [she] enjoyed the connection to the floor." Taking this information in and then utilizing it in the context of classical ballet partnering, Student 1 observed, "both partners had to either push down slightly or pull up. What mattered was that both people did their part." This was a major breakthrough for Student 1 as he was now able to see how both partners are working equally. One was not leading more than the other; even the non-lead in a ballet partnership has control of his/her own body. Building from the experience gained from the energy leader/follower work, students then placed their hands in full contact with the bodies of

their partners. From this experience, students learned to sense the minute adjustments that need to occur when partnering. For Student 5, the task demanded a "responsibility and required a lot of concentration and contact push and pull to find that right spot, that happy medium." Student 4 stated:

> "spinning takes so much balance and leg strength; it was too much for me. The main make or break point of this partnership was the availability of trust in your partner. If you tried to do too much on your own, your body tensed up and you were unable to spin well. If you did too little, then you didn't have the support to spin very well. It was finding that balance between you and your partner that dictated how effective and smooth your turns were."

The intention of my choice to move our exploration into the theatre space was to demonstrate what was involved in a performance in terms of partnering. This brought into perspective what was involved when moving dance learning from a classroom to the stage. Student 1 wrote, "Like most large scale productions of anything, teamwork seems like a must. You could make the presumption that you are partnering with everyone on the crew of the theater." Educational settings can feel safe, however when moving practices, such as partnering, from the classroom to the stage dancers may become overwhelmed. Helping students understand these feelings could be another secondary outcome of this exercise. It could also instill a deeper respect for the process of dance partnering. This is where I feel that my experience as a retired professional allowed me to bring the information I gained to pass along to my students.

For one lesson, I arranged for a social outing off campus. My intention was to create closer communication and trust bonds between students by putting their learning in another context. Student 2 stated, "I really enjoyed connecting with the people in the class and getting to know them better. I think it helped from the partnering sense of creating bonds of trust." Student 3 reflected that it had been "fun and interesting to find out about everyone." Through exploring contact improvisation, I wanted students to investigate and understand the questions guiding my research. To take an exercise such as trying to copy someone else's body patterning on the spot is "instant improvisation." In response to this, Student 5 wrote, "It felt awkward but was also difficult to keep the same speed as someone and movement as this person. Most people were just passing through and were walking fast or looking at their phones. There was little or no human interaction with others." Student 4 stated,

> "It was surprisingly hard to match some of the walking habits. While the rhythm of walking varied from person to person, it wasn't too hard to synchronize over a few steps. This is similar to a musical beat when dancing. It is pretty effortless to get in synch with the beat. Problems began to arise when trying to match body movement. There were people with light steps, medium steps, and heavy steps. The lighter step people were more closely aligned with my own walking style and, thus, easier to follow. People who overemphasized their steps were a lot harder to match. It was not intuitive to me how they walk so slow and heavy."

The exercise reinforced understanding of the improvisation we are engaged in every day of our lives. By the end of the semester, students were beginning to analyze body movement and understand how to read and respond to this information.

One thing I learned from this project is that observation is fundamental to developing partnering skills. Acute observation involves all the senses. Student 4's journal entry stated, "As a final reflection, I think partnerships are more than just physical connections. There are certain people that you dance with where you both know what you're doing, but something just feels off. Other times, you find that you synchronize well with someone for no obvious reason. It's just one of those weird things." I found this interesting because a purpose of this research was to develop skills and awareness to work in partnerships in synchronizing ways.

A question I posed to students to help them further analyze their learning was, "How do the perceptions of partnering change when non-tactile and tactile exploration is explored?" The feedback I received was that they had never thought that ballet and contact improvisation could inform one another. Commonalities of partnering exist between different dance forms and they were now starting to see how one form could influence another. In the final unit of the study, students were able to see with greater clarity how adjustments must be made with each partner. Student 3 responded, "I really liked the switching of partners while we were back to back because it forced me to move in different ways and become more aggressive." This was something new for this student. She had stated to me that she did not like to lead and she felt strange in contact improvisation. Student 5 stated: "It was hard for me not to laugh at first but as we went on I knew the

person behind me was looking out for me and I began to relax." At the conclusion of this exercise, we sat down to discuss the day's work. I asked the students, "Who was a leader and who was a follower in the role of walking forward and backwards?" The students were split down the middle in their answers. Some felt that if you were pushing/walking backwards you were the leader. Then the others felt that if you were walking forward that they were the leaders. By doing this I had pushed the students into a point of questioning leader and follower roles. Student 6 added: "I always feel like I have tension that interferes with my partnering. It's just so hard for me to not be nervous!" In the next entry Student 6 wrote, "Basically, when off balance you lean into your partner, but you have to have them pushing back into you." She was starting to understand that she needed to relax so she could feel and respond to her partner.

3. What commonalities of partnering exist between different dance forms?

This question really started to gain ground in the middle of the semester. The section that I feel really spurred this questioning was the capoeira exploration. The feedback was that a lot of the students had never heard about this form and never felt that what we were doing was partnering. But after participating they felt that they now had found that connection to someone without having to touch them. My main instructional focus was achieved, that of having students recognize how diverse forms can influence each other. Student 5 noted, "I found it really inspiring and interesting. The movements remind me of break dancing, even with the circle. The whole story behind this style of dance is really

inspirational." Student 6 stated, "I'm not going to lie I was a little nervous, as I know capoeira is a very martial arts based. However, the whole history behind capoeira is really interesting. I had no idea it had African roots. The instruments sound really unique." Student 4 shared:

> "Capoeira was painful but fun. It wasn't a dance I had any experience with previously. I liked the fact that it had a flowing movement with a variety of techniques. We didn't really do any partner work with capoeira while I was there, so I can't comment too much on the topic. From what I saw in the video, however, it looks like partnering is the entire point of capoeira. You have to be able to interpret your opponent's moves, deflect or dodge it, and then offer a countermove. Really good players seem to be able to anticipate movements by body positions and an opponent's prior movements. It's pretty fascinating how much experience is worth with a dance like this one. It's also interesting how well it translates to other dances. From ballroom, I can see the removal and filling of spaces concept being employed. While one player moves from one location to the next, the other player comes into the opened space to fill it. There are also no leaders and followers for this dance. It seems it is advantageous to control the flow of the fight, but that can be reversed at any given time with a sudden, off-beat strike."

Through the experience of Capoeira I was aiming to give students an opportunity to partner with a musical instrument and not just the movement of someone else. I believe sharing the history of all the forms explored in this course helped students find their own

connection to the forms and partnering itself. Students had some very personal responses to the learning. Student 3 noted:

> "The movement was interesting but I felt uncomfortable doing the more aggressive moves. I am not sure that I could have actually partnered in this style because I feel really uncomfortable around any kind of violence. There are very strict rules in the games that I had never realized just from watching. The relationship to the music was important. There were many layers of partnering: music, opponents, people on outside of circle, people's voices."

As an instructor, I tried to emphasize that we were not fighting, and that this was an exploration of a form that was a martial art. I did not want any of the students to feel uncomfortable with this. This is definitely food for thought in my future teaching endeavors. Student 6 had a very different response: "It was really fun to learn some of the basics though, it gives you a much better appreciation for the art!" Student 5 stated: "Trying something different gives me more of an appreciation for it now. It's not just simple kicks and movement." At the end of this session we conversed about what types of interactions happened. The feedback was that a lot of the students had never heard about this form and never felt that what we were doing was partnering. But after participating they felt that they had discovered a connection to someone without having to touch them. Student 1 expressed:

> "I really enjoyed the first few dances because I was not expecting them. It was nice to see the piece and to learn where they came from. Such as the cutting of the sugar cane

and the coffee bean harvest. It's interesting how everything is more then it seems and how it has a hidden meaning. I never knew of this style of dance and I enjoyed how everything is so intense and filled with meaning and symbolism even in the songs."

Within mambo each partner is improvising and you have a very strong connection with your partner. Similarly, in capoeira, you have a very strong connection to your partner in the *roda*, and you are having a conversation with them. This is true in mambo, the conversation can be smooth or fast and rough. For the mambo unit I asked one of our local experts, who also happened to be taking my partnering class to teach the form. I feel that this was of great benefit to all the students because they already knew this person and were comfortable with him. Additionally, it created a smoother transition from a class with me to another student facilitating. In response to the mambo unit Student 3 stated: "This style was really easy for me to understand and I felt like the basic steps gave me a lot of room to play and know what to do if I am a follower. I actually preferred being the follower in this style." Student 6 wrote: "Today we started Mambo! Now this is what most people expect when they think of partnering." Student 4 stated:

"I'm pretty familiar with salsa on one, but only slightly familiar with salsa on two. Meaning, I like to start moving forward instead of backwards on beat one. We all learned the same basic steps. What separates the more experienced dancers from the lesser experienced, is how grounded your body is. More experienced dancers tend to step with their toes and push into the ground, making their hips sway forward and back in the process. Less experienced dancers tend to step and drag their legs along, with

little hip movement. It was fun to see that as we danced with people, their bodies began to adapt to the correct body movements. If they started out stiff, they eventually had some adjustment to match hip swings"

In short some of the things that I felt did not work were the areas I did not have experience in. I was less able to lead questioning and exploration into my ideas. Mabo was one of these week areas, but with that being said I felt it would be a great learning opportunity for me and the class. As I reflect on this experience today I still feel this way. I still want to explore Mabo in more detail. This is so I can further my understanding of the slight differences to the other techniques explored in this class. We are forever students of movement and we are forever learning. During my current exploration of movement through Capoeira is allowing me to understand partnering in another light. This light I refer to is the understanding I have found through movement and the exploration we find in this creativity.

FURTHER RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

After the development and implementation of this frame, I reflected on the process and outcomes to write this document. Since that time, I have further explored these ideas in my practices. In particular, I have worked intensively integrating these concepts into my facilitation of Capoeira. One concept I have been investigating is exploring the lens of positive and negative space within Capoeira from a partnering perspective. I am finding many more crossovers between my training and teaching in other dance forms to Capoeira. I have had the opportunity to work with a wide range of ages and abilities within Capoeira. The classes range from children's classes (ages 3-14) to the accredited Arizona State University "Capoeira 1" class I help instruct and facilitate. I have had the amazing opportunity to further explore and develop these ideas of partnering through a martial art form and have learned to adapt my level of explanation depending on age and skill level. I have found that my continued study of the creativity of these young individuals has led me to see greater possibilities of partnering through non-touch forms.

My investigation into partnering has continued after the conclusion of my MFA project. I have discovered that without any style guides or a technical approach to partnering, these children were exploring and learning the same principles I had through a structure dance lens. I have observed that this seems to be an unconscious decision on their part. My observations in teaching have led me to ask them questions like, "What did you just do, why did you move that way?" Some of the answers given have been, "I could fit there" or "I could get to the other side to position myself to offensively kick or defend," depending on their age. I have found that these children are very kinesthetically aware but

not in the same way adults are. Children seem to have a natural understanding of their relationship to others and where they are in space and time in relationship to their partner in the “Roda”. This kinesthetic awareness seems to have to be relearned as people get older. I am very interested in further exploring this observation.

CONCLUSION

My research explored a curriculum devoted to the practice of partnering in multiple forms of dance in one fifteen week course. In this research I asked the questions: How do the students currently understand and perceive partnering and how has this view changed? How do leader and follower roles play a part in dance partnering? What commonalities of partnering exist between different dance forms? These questions guided the exploration of my research into multiple partnering forms.

Data collected in this study suggest that students' perceptions of partnering changed throughout the semester, as evidenced from student journals and personal feedback. The questions I posed aided students in their exploration of partnering and reflecting upon how they practiced it. Students started the beginning of the semester with the mindset that partnering was something similar to mambo or classical ballet. By mid-semester the students started to understand how they could engage in partnering, even without physical contact. They came to realize they could still be in a dance partnership through a non-tactile connection involving kinesthetic sensing. My research has led me to new questions and areas of inquiry. Some of those questions include: "When do the lines of partnership become blurred? How does a developed partnership become teamwork? Most importantly, how could I better contextualize and format this coursework for greater exploration into dance partnerships? This is something that though my further exploration into partnering through Capoeira has lead me to question. The non-touch and negative space within this art form have lead me to question about partnering. One is the contextual creativity to the

conversations that happen in a roda between to movers. I feel this has a similar understanding to my other explorations within partnering but with a different vocabulary. Each takes its time to understand fully and sometimes I feel it may never be understood.

It is my belief that all forms of partnering can and should be explored by dancers on all levels of training and age. Partnering skills and connections can help students find the commonalities within all dance forms. As such, I will continue in my research of multiple forms of dance partnering and use this question to guide me in my future endeavors. There is a lack of research available that focuses on inter-stylistic approaches to dance partnering and the connections that can be explored. It is my intent to continue to develop the curriculum prepared for this research and to implement aspects of it into my teaching of Capoeira.

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